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ARGENTINA

In an effort to head off trouble from organized labor, Argentina's military junta has decreed an across-the-board 15-percent pay hike, effective June 1st. The government has also arrested a number of businessmen accused of price gouging.

The pay increase will be augmented by increases in family allowances. Even so, workers will not be able to keep pace with inflation, which is running at 30 to 35 percent a month.

The arrest of businessmen is designed to give substance to the junta's earlier promise to punish anyone who tries to take unfair advantage of its decision to lift price controls. One of the government's early acts was to remove such controls in an effort to avert shortages of consumer goods. Among those detained is the local head of a US-owned firm. The arrests may also be a gesture toward organized labor at a time when much of the junta's economic policy most directly benefits business.

Although the junta has moved to deprive labor of the political and economic power it held during the Peron regimes, the government cannot afford to alienate workers. Even though the unions are now under close government supervision, they have the potential to be politically disruptive. A highly restive work force would be difficult, if not impossible, to keep in line without recourse to the repressive tactics the junta has thus far successfully avoided. [redacted] 3.5(c)

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